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RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0381
RUEHG/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2286
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001188

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS
MCC FOR D NASSIRY AND E BURKE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/27/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA OPEN TO ENGAGEMENT ON TIP ACTION PLAN

REF: A. STATE 113842

[¶](#)B. COLOMBO 1031
[¶](#)C. COLOMBO 943
[¶](#)D. STATE 71163

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

[¶](#)11. (C) SUMMARY: DCM and Poloff called on Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona on August 23 to deliver ref A talking points and Trafficking in Persons (TIP) action plan. DCM noted that the primary reason for watchlisting Sri Lanka was insufficient evidence of Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) efforts to address trafficking in persons, including a poor record on punishing those responsible for placing workers in situations of involuntary servitude. Kohona responded that the GSL has been "very mindful" of this issue, and noted that any failure to address the problem was a result of capacity restraints, not a problem of political will. He argued that, given Sri Lanka's low rate of convictions overall, setting a numerical target for TIP convictions would be unrealistic. DCM highlighted an upcoming U.S.-funded International Organization for Migration (IOM) project that will focus on case management and tracking as well as law enforcement training. Post plans to follow up with the Chairman of the Foreign Employment Bureau, the Director of the Women and Children's Bureau of the Sri Lankan Police, and other relevant officials. The MFA's proposal, in response to our presentation of the action plan, to establish a TIP working group within the GSL, could lead to greater coordination of efforts between government entities that handle different aspects of the trafficking issue. End Summary.

[¶](#)12. (C) DCM and Poloff called on Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona on August 23 to deliver ref tel talking points and TIP action plan. Deputy Director for UN and Multilateral Affairs Samantha Pathirana, Director General for Political Affairs E. Rodney Perera, and GSL consultant on women's and children's issues Dr. Hiranthi Wijemanne also attended. DCM noted that the primary reason for watchlisting Sri Lanka was

insufficient evidence of GSL efforts to address trafficking in persons, including a poor record on punishing those responsible for placing workers in situations of involuntary servitude.

GSL Aware of the Problem

¶ 13. (C) Kohona responded that the GSL has been "very mindful" of this issue. Any failure to address the problem was a result of capacity limitations, he said, not a lack of political will. He noted that Sri Lanka is a party to the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution as well as the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons. Wijemanne noted various GSL efforts to address the issue. The Human Rights Commission, she said, ordered a report on migrant women in 2005, which revealed that there were 400 to 500 registered recruitment agents in Sri Lanka, as well as 700-800 subagents, who are difficult to monitor and control. She also noted that the Child Protection Authority has established a database for tracking trafficking of children, but has not been proactive about entering cases.

Sri Lanka Lacks Criminal Justice Capacity

¶ 14. (C) Kohona acknowledged the low rate of convictions on TIP offenses, but pointed out that Sri Lanka's overall conviction rate is only 5 percent and that there is a 3-year backlog of cases in the court system. He argued that, under these circumstances, setting a numerical target for

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convictions would be unrealistic. He and Wijemanne suggested benchmarks for GSL progress that were based on "processes rather than outcomes." Wijemanne gave the example of administrative improvements in visa processing that led to a reduction in Sri Lankan boys being sent to Saudi Arabia as camel jockeys. No one was ever convicted for trafficking the boys, she said, but the practice was almost completely eliminated.

Next Steps

¶ 15. (C) DCM highlighted an upcoming U.S.-funded IOM project that will focus on case management and tracking as well as law enforcement training. Wijemanne recommended that the police training be targeted toward 38 regional Women and Children Units set up throughout the country. Those officers, she said, would be more aware of the problems and uniquely positioned to make a difference on TIP. She offered to coordinate with the Secretary of Women's Empowerment and Child Development to see what additional GSL follow-up is needed, and to look into a possible GSL TIP working group to bring together key actors on TIP. Kohona undertook to identify a primary point of contact for the Embassy on TIP issues.

¶ 16. (U) Post plans to follow up with the Chairman of the Foreign Employment Bureau, the Director of the Women and Children's Bureau of the Sri Lankan Police, the Chairman of the Child Protection Authority, the Attorney General, and the Additional Secretary of Justice on these same issues. Post will report additional responses and progress septel.

¶ 17. (C) COMMENT: The GSL seems to have a good grasp of TIP issues and an awareness of its own shortcomings. Most of our interlocutors on TIP seem eager to make improvements and willing to work with the U.S. on this. However, they also are pragmatic about what can be accomplished, at least in the short term, given Sri Lanka's resource and capacity constraints. With several different government ministries and departments sharing responsibility for addressing

different aspects of the trafficking in persons issue, effective coordination within the government is lacking. The MFA's proposal, as a result of our presentation of the action plan, to establish a GSL working group on TIP is a positive step.

BLAKE